LARRY SEFTON
MEMORIAL LECTURE

"The State and Labour in Modern America"

by

Professor Melvyn Dubovsky

[i.e., Dubofsky]

Woodsworth College

University of Toronto

THE FOURTH LARRY SEFTON MEMORIAL LECTURE

The State and Labor in Modern America

by

Melvyn Dubofsky
Professor of History and Sociology
State University of New York at Binghamton
October 23, 1986

Mrs. Sefton, members of the Sefton family, Professor Kruger, who so graciously introduced me, and all the members of the audience, it is indeed an honor to be invited to deliver the Fourth Larry Sefton Memorial Lecture. I must confess, however, that unlike my three predecessors, on this platform, I never had the pleasure of knowing Larry Sefton, either closely or in passing. I must also confess that unlike my three predecessors, who actually participated directly in the process of industrial relations and also made labor history, I have only written it. Compared to the three previous lecturers, I suspect that occasionally I may sound like a visitor from another planet, or should I say, ivory tower. I also think that this audience may be somewhat different from the earlier ones, owing to the simultaneous meeting of the Eighth Annual North American Labor History Conference and to the many academic scholars its sessions have attracted from both sides of the border.

All this reminds me of the theme of the first Sefton Lecture, which was delivered by Lynn Williams, now president of the United Steelworkers of America and the first Canadian citizen to hold such a position in the North American labor movement. Williams spoke about building bridges between the labor movement and the university. Tonight I also would like to think of myself as something of a bridge-builder, in this case, constructing links between academic specialists in labor history and a general audience, between those who have devoted their scholarship to the past and those who are more interested and involved in contemporary affairs.

Despite my own personal proclivity for studying the past, I would like to open my discussion of the state and labor in modern America with a few words concerning the parlous state of trade unionism south of the border today. All of you are aware, I am sure, that the United States has a smaller percentage of its labor force unionized than any other advanced industrial nation. From a post-World War II high of nearly 36 percent of the nonagricultural labor force represented by unions, today's level is only 18 percent and falling. From the end of the Korean War in 1953 until the late 1970s union membership as a proportion of the labor force declined steadily and slowly but unions themselves continued to grow. Over the last five years, however, trade unions in the United States have lost over five million members, a loss which persisted despite the economic expansion which has followed the deepest contraction since the Great Depression of the 1930s. Not only have unions lost members; they have also signed concessionary contracts which have surrendered several of labor's most cherished gains. Official statistics from the Department of Labor show that over the past five years most new union contracts have granted wage increases less than the inflation rate and less than the rises typically received by nonunion workers. The statistics moreover reveal that the number of strikes has declined to a level not experienced since the balmy days of the late 1920s. All the indicators point to a labor movement in full retreat.

It is not a coincidence that the decline of the American labor movement has coincided with the presidential reign of Ronald Reagan. When Reagan entered the White House in January 1981, trade unions in the

United States were already in disarray. The President's brutal treatment of the Patco strikers in 1982 sent employers and workers a message that could not be missed: hereafter the federal government would not tolerate militant action by trade unions. The wonder of all this is not that half or more of the voters in union families cast their ballots for Reagan in 1980. Rather it is that four years later they did so once again.

What makes developments in the United States during the last five years more perplexing is the contrast with what has been happening among workers on this side of the border. Faced with the same global economic crisis, a new conservative government in power, and an even less expansive job market, Canadian workers have neither deserted their unions, whose membership has actually risen, nor buckled under to employer demands for contractual concessions.

Two primary explanations have been offered to account for the differences between the trajectories of trade unionism in the late twentieth century in the United States and Canada. Paul Weiler, a Canadian and a professor of labor law at the Harvard Law School, has suggested in a long essay which he published in the Harvard Law Review that the variations in the growth patterns of the U.S. and the Canadian labor movements are best explained by the differences in the industrial relations codes of the two nations. ("Promises to Keep: Securing Workers' Rights to Self-Organization under the NLRA," V. 96 (June 1983), 1768-1827.) By contrast, the American sociologist, Seymour Martin Lipset, has asserted that the cause for the difference in trade-union

growth is to be found in the unlike American and Canadian value systems, the former which stresses individualism and mobility, the latter which sanctions more cooperative modes of behavior and a stronger corporate sense of community. ("North American Labor Movements: A Comparative Perspective," in Unions in Transition, Entering the Second Century, (San Francisco, 1986), 421-51, and Consensus and Conflict, Essays in Political Sociology, New Brunswick, NJ 1986), 1-8). Personally, like Weiler, I prefer to look to the state and its concrete labor policies rather than such abstract concepts as national character or value systems in order to understand patterns in trade union development.
And that is precisely what I would like to do tonight in cursory fashion, tracing the relationship between the growth of the American labor movement and the shifting labor policies of the national state from the turn of the twentieth century to the present.

The English political scientist Ralph Miliband has written that:

> More than ever before men now live in the shadow of the state. . . . It is for the state's attention, or for its control, that men compete; and it is against the state that beat the waves of social conflict.

This, I think, is especially true for trade unions, their members, and the whole process of industrial relations, which certainly is a form of social conflict.

In seeking to understand precisely how the state intervenes in the sphere of labor-capital relations, we must first come to grips with several theories which explain the bases for state action. In North America, the pluralist model of public policy implementation prevails.

In that model, public officials, freely and openly elected to office under democratic rules, serve the interests of those who vote for them. Because no single group of voters dominates the society and economy, contending blocs, or interest groups, compete for public favor. Public officials, in turn, act as honest brokers, mediating among the competing power blocs on behalf of the larger public interest. The reverse image of the pluralist model is the crude, or vulgar, Marxist one. In that model, the state serves as the slugging agency of the ruling class, instrumentally determining that the interests of capital prevail whenever challenged.

Because the history of most industrial societies in the twentieth century shows manifold examples of the state acting against the immediate interests of capitalists, a school of leftist scholars has sought to revise the instrumental Marxist model. These theorists assert that the state acts autonomously, that it is not the agency of a ruling class or even of competing blocs. As Fred Block titled one of his more controversial essays, "The Ruling Class Does Not Rule." The state in fact becomes itself a primary arena for class and social conflict. Yet, in the last analysis, although the state acts autonomously, it promotes the larger interests of capital by subordinating the sectoral and selfish concerns of individual capitalists to the general welfare, a process which creates the social peace necessary for the expanded reproduction of capital.

Recently, a variation of this last theory has gained considerable weight among several scholars who have written books and essays analyzing the state and labor in North America. Christopher Tomlins in his detailed history of federal labor relations policy in the United States from the Wagner Act to the Taft-Hartley Act asserts that all labor can expect to win from the state is a "counterfeit liberty." Tomlins and those whose theoretical work he has drawn on, including Karl Klare, Katherine Stone, and other members of the school of critical legal history, concede that the modern state has promoted trade unionism and especially "collective bargaining is a system for inducing workers to participate in their own domination by managers and those whom managers serve."

This interpretation has had its echoes on the Canadian side of the border. Canada's Industrial Relations Act of 1948 (the northern variation of the Wagner Act) was, assert Leo Panitch and Donald Swartz, "an adjustment devised not to undermine but to secure and maintain under new conditions capital's long run . . . dominant position. . . . What before had taken the appearance of the Mounties' charge, now increasingly took the form of the rule of law by which unions policed themselvs in most instances." So Canadian workers, too, found themselves bequeathed a "counterfeit liberty" by their state, one in which, according to Panitch and Swartz, "trade unionism . . . bore all the signs of the web of legalistic restrictions which enveloped it. Its practices and consciousness were highly legalistic and bureaucratic, and its collective strength accordingly limited." ("Towards Permanent Exceptionalism: Coercion and Consent in Canadian Industrial Relations," Labour/Le Travail, 13 (Spring 1984), 133-57.)

Thus, whether among American, Canadian, and even an English-born scholar (Tomlins) of the state and industrial relations, we see an interpretation that argues, first, that the state has acted to suppress rank-and-file militancy, trade union autonomy, and trade union democracy in the interest of social stability and capital accumulation. And, second, that the law has rendered trade unions the servants of capital and the state. In contrast to this emerging interpretation, I would like to suggest that the relationship between the state and labor is far more ambiguous and open-ended and that workers and their unions have much to gain from positive state action.

Before I make my case concerning the positive impact of the state on the labor movement in the United States, a caveat is in order. With one exception, and even that one is only partly true, the health of the labor movement has been greatly dependent on economic cycles. The New Deal years aside, trade unionism in the United States has risen and fallen in harmony with the expansion and contraction of the national economy. Nevertheless, I would still like to insist upon the salience of the state in the history of the modern United States labor movement. Let me now try to elaborate.

A good place to begin might be with a quick glance at those moments when trade unionism in the United States advanced most rapidly and broadly. My reading of history and statistics reveals that there were six especially significant periods of union growth:--the years at the turn of the twentieth century, roughly from 1898 to 1903, when the organized labor movement more than quintupled in size; the World War I years, 1916-20, when trade unions nearly doubled their membership; the New Deal years, when organizers rebuilt a theretofore moribund labor movement; the World War II years, when mass-production unionism matured and the so-called modern industrial relations system came into being; the Korean War period, 1950-53, when unionism reached the upper limits of this historical penetration among American workers; and finally, the years of Lyndon B. Johnson's "Great Society," 1964-68, the last time trade unionism experienced an absolute increase in membership size. In the remainder of this lecture I would like to try to show how the national state played a decisive role in the expansion of trade unionism and in stimulating the militancy of workers.

The years from 1898 to 1903 marked a real change in the attitudes and policies of the national government toward workers and their unions. Prior to that time, the federal government, especially its executive and judicial branches, had acted most often and decisively to thwart the expression of working-class militancy. Using common law precedents forbidding conspiracies in restraint of trade and federal antimonopoly laws, federal judges issued a series of injunctions that crippled strikes and trade unionism. From Republican president Rutherford B. Hayes in 1877 to Democrat Grover Cleveland in 1894, chief executives used federal marshals and troops to smash strikes. The bloody history of industrial warfare in the late nineteenth century, however, caused many politicians and officeholders to search for nonrepressive solutions to the labor problem. This approach was influenced by the presence of working-class voters, whose ballots in hotly-contested elections often proved decisive.

The first substantial sign of the new consciousness among federal officials was the passage of the Erdman Act by Congress in 1898. With this piece of legislation, congress legitimated the place of the railroad brotherhoods on the nation's major railway lines. The Erdman Act outlawed "yellow-dog," or antiunion contracts; called on railway management to negotiate with unions; and created rudimentary federal mediation machinery to avert strikes. After its passage, the operating railway workers never again faced the elimination of their unions from the industry. In fact, over the next eighteen years additional federal legislation confirmed the legitimacy and influence of the Brotherhoods, and in 1916, congress conceded to the political influence of railway unions by legislating a mandatory eight-hour day for all operating railway employees (Adamson Act).

Railway legislation was only one indication of new national policies in the realm of labor relations. In 1900, a congressional commission established to investigate the relations between labor and capital in all the nation's basic industries published its final report and recommendations. The Industrial Commission not only offered the fullest available record of the relations between employers and workers in all sectors of the American economy, including agriculture; its summary recommendations spoke highly of the positive role trade unions played in securing justice for workers who, as individuals, were impotent in the labor market and the workshop. It also criticized the role and decisions of federal judges whose injunctions roiled labor relations and indeed made the state appear to serve as the slugging agency for capitalism. Unfortunately, the report of the Industrial Commission reflected residual attitudes from the nineteenth century as well as the emergent values of the new one. For the same recommendations which lauded trade unionism praised individualism and the right to work without coercion by either employers or unions. In a sense, then, the Commission granted unions an equal right to organize workers and employers the same right to smash unions. In practice, this meant that from 1898 through 1903 when profits were rising and labor markets tightening, unions successfully implemented their right to organize. After 1903, as the labor market loosened and the economy stagnated, employers practiced their equal right to eliminate unions.

President Theodore Roosevelt exemplified best these contradictory tendencies at work in the early twentieth century. His labor policies put into practice the recommendations of the Industrial Commission. Unlike his predecessors in the White House who used troops to break strikes, Roosevelt used federal power to compel the monopolists in the hard-coal industry to bargain with their workers and their union, the United Mine Workers of America. The president's intervention in the anthractice coal strike of 1902 secured the survival of unionism among hard-coal miners and established the foundation for the future expansion of the UMW. Yet the settlement of the dispute pointedly protected the employment rights of nonunion workers by legitimating open-shop arrangements and curbing the miners' right to strike. Roosevelt implemented a similar policy among federal employees when he denied the International Typographical Union the right to maintain a closed shop in the Government Printing Office.

Despite the limitations to trade unionism inherent in the new national labor policies as promulgated by the Industrial Commission and practiced by Roosevelt, the president of the United Mine Workers of America, John Mitchell, asserted in 1903 that: "The trade union movement in this country can make progress only by identifying itself with the state." His remark was obviously occasioned by the recent experience of trade unionists (a growth rate of over 500%) and a national government which now tolerated and sometimes promoted labor organization, if not class consciousness and socialism.

Some ten years later, other labor leaders put Mitchell's words to the test. When Woodrow Wilson and the Democrats swept to national power in the election of 1912, a regime with which organized labor had completely identified itself came into office. Samuel Gompers had put the machinery of the American Federation of Labor to work on behalf of Wilson's election. Now, he expected labor to benefit. President Wilson did not disappoint his allies in the labor movement. The new president consulted Gompers on a regular basis. Wilson spoke at the dedication of the Federation's new office building in Washington, and he was also the first president to speak at a convention of the AFL (1916). These were only symbols. The Wilson Administration also offered labor substance. In choosing the first secretary of labor, the president turned to a former member and officer of the United Mine Workers, William B. Wilson.

Secretary Wilson in turn staffed the newly-created labor department and its mediation service with former trade-union officials, especially those he had known personally in the UMW. Wilson and his subordinates believed it their mission to promote the case for trade unionism within the federal government and the nation-at-large. President Wilson appointed the members of a new federal commission on industrial relations which in 1915 issued one of the most radical presidential commission reports in United States history. The Commission majority, consisting of Chairman Frank P. Walsh, his allies, and the union members, recommended that the federal government guarantee workers the right to organize; promote the cause of industrial democracy without which there could be no effective political democracy; and insure the more equal distribution of the nation's income and wealth (Walsh and his colleagues laid out in 1915 what twenty years later became the social and economic program of the New Deal in its most radical phase). Even the two more conservative minority reports issued by dissenting members of the Commission praised responsible unionism, suggested that employers would benefit from negotiations with moderate labor leaders, and promoted a form of "antagonistic cooperation" between labor and capital.

In the first years of the Wilson Administration, labor benefitted only minimally from its identification with the state. Economic contraction and rising unemployment between 1913 and 1915 weakened labor's bargaining power and the appeal of trade unionism. The outbreak of World War I in the summer of 1914 and the intervention of the United States three years later enabled organized labor to use its friends in

Washington to better advantage. Even before the United States became a belligerent, President Wilson invited Gompers to serve as a member of the Council of National Defense. After April 1917, other labor leaders also served on a wide variety of tripartite (business, labor, and government) agencies charged with rationalizing the war production effort. Trade union officials helped make labor policy in the shipyards, construction of military training camps, coal mines, and on the railroads. Never before had the labor movement been so fully and enthusiastically identified with the national state.

For doing so, trade unionism received many benefits. War production policymakers and their labor allies established the following national labor policies: the basic eight-hour day; equal wages for equal work; the prevailing union rate of wages as the norm; and the right of workers to organize and bargain collectively. Clasped by the friendly hand of the national state, trade unions doubled their membership between 1916 and 1920, claiming more than five million members by the latter year. It was only natural that established unions and workers with a tradition of unionism would seize the opportunity to organize. More remarkable, however, was how workers lacking union traditions and employed in sectors of the economy long impermeable to unionism were mobilized by federal policy and intervention. Wherever the National War Labor Board intervened, workers grew increasingly assertive about their shop-floor rights and militant in defense of trade unionism. In its less than two-year lifetime, the NLRB docketed more than 1100 cases in every sector of the economy and every region of the country. Its agents promoted trade unionism, and they demanded that employers compensate workers penalized for union membership and activity, including substantial awards of backpay.

Such solicitude toward labor by federal policymakers led the leader of the campaign to unionize workers in the meatpacking and steel industries, William Z. Foster, to say, ". . . the Federal administration was friendly; the right to organize was freely conceded by the government and even insisted upon. . . . The gods were indeed fighting on the side of Labor." It caused a member of one of the nonoperating railroad workers' unions to conclude: "A worker . . . with a union card in his pocket will be looked after and has been assured by the government of this great country of ours that he will get a square deal." Which led a fellow union member to add: "If this is what government control means. Lets have more and plenty of it." Referring to how the federal government had required the shipbuilders to bargain with the labor leaders in the industry, James O'Connell, president of the Metal Trades Department of the AFL, told the convention of the Boilermakers' Union in 1917, ". . . in this crisis, instead of our power being lessened, we will come out after the war is over bigger and greater and grander and better understood than we ever were before." How right indeed John Mitchell's words now appeared!

What happened when the war ended and federal intervention in industrial relations diminished, employers more strongly resisted trade unionism, and Republicans returned to national power, offered additional proof. Between 1919 and 1922, mass-production, open-shop industry smashed the trade unions. In steel, meatpacking, and among the nation's nonoperating railroad workers unions practically disappeared. The same story repeated itself almost everywhere that workers had first organized during World War I. As David Brody has written, this history proved that "depending on their own economic strength, American workers could not defeat the massed power of open-shop industry."

Labor had to wait for the coming of the New Deal to assault the fortresses of the open shop, and this time come away with a series of victories. Better than any other period in history, the years of the New Deal exposed the ambiguous character of state-labor relations and the vulnerability of national officials to external relations of political and economic power. In understanding what actually happened during the 1930s, it is best to subdivide the New Deal into three periods, each of which had different implications for the relationship between the state and labor.

During the first two years of the New Deal, 1933-34, workers acted as if liberated from the doldrums of depression and business <u>cum</u> Republican hegemony. The labor movement now believed it had friends in Washington. As the slogan used by the United Mine Workers of America in its blitzkrieg organizing campaign of the summer 1933 reminded coal miners: "The President wants you to join the union." Which president, Roosevelt or Lewis, was never specified. In the event, those workers with a tradition of unionism and employed in sectors of the economy which had bargained with unions in the past rebuilt their shattered organizations. At the same time in sectors of the economy previously impermeable to unionism--automobiles, steel, electrical goods, and Southern textiles, among others--workers began to unionize and strike. They, too, expected support from allies in government. Workers in mass-production industry, however, miscalculated. In 1933 and 1934, Roosevelt's primary commitment was to economic recovery, and in his estimation of political and economic realities cooperation with "big business" was essential. Capital, not labor, determined levels of investment, quantities of production, and the extent of employment. To encourage business to invest more, produce more, and employ more, the New Deal deferred to the judgment of corporate executives in matters of labor relations. Roosevelt and his lieutenants implemented policies in 1933-34 which crippled unionism in the mass-production industries and also ensured the defeat in 1934 of the massive textile strike in the American South. As the year 1934 ended, the major corporations appeared in firm control of their labor forces and policies. In no small measure, the early New Deal had assisted mass-production firms in containing worker resistance.

Unfortunately for Roosevelt and fortunately for labor, the labor policies of the early New Deal neither restored national economic health nor bolstered the political fortunes of the Democratic party. Instead, unemployment remained high, big business attacked Roosevelt for the New Deal's "socialistic" tendencies, and pressures mounted on the White House from the political left. Roosevelt reacted to the new realities and shifting political relations of power by pursuing a new line on labor, hesitantly in 1935 and more enthusiastically in 1936. This shift by Roosevelt heralded one of the most fundamental transformations in the history of organized labor in the United States.

The first omen came in early summer 1935 when Roosevelt signed the Wagner Act (the National Labor Relations Act of 1935), which was perhaps the single most radical piece of legislation enacted by any congress. It was truly organized labor's "Magna Carta." Only practice, however, would test the promise of the Wagner Act, and most antiunion, open-shop employers threatened to resist the law's implementation. Without direct support from the state, trade unions could not expect to benefit from the new legislation. The politics of 1936, however, insured that state support would be forthcoming. In preparing for the presidential election, Roosevelt worked closely with the best-known leader of insurgent labor, John L. Lewis. During a series of private conferences at the White House in the summer of 1936, the president promised Lewis that the national government would buttress the labor leader's campaign to organize steel and other mass-production industries. Lewis, in turn, guaranteed the president the electoral support of mass-production workers.

The election results heartened Roosevelt and Lewis. The week after the election Lewis told his associates on the CIO executive board: "We must capitalize on the election. The CIO was out fighting for Roosevelt and every steel town showed a smashing victory for him. We wanted a President who would hold the light for us while we went out and organized." And as the year 1936 ended, and the CIO was about to launch its most concerted organizing drive among automobile and steel workers, indeed on the first night of the great Flint sitdown strike, Lewis informed a national radio audience: "Labor will expect the protection of the Federal Government in the pursuit of its lawful objectives."

For the next several months CIO received that protection. Buoyed by its friends in the White House and in several state capitols, CIO won victories against General Motors, U.S. Steel, Chrysler, Firestone, and other mass-production firms,. "As years go by," Lewis announced to the CIO executive board in March 1937, "this period will be marked as epoch in [the] life of labor organizations--and [in the] economic, social, [and] political history of America." Or as Benjamin Stolberg reported in the Nation the previous month: "The CIO has changed significantly the relation of social forces in American industry. It is profoundly affecting our two major political parties. It is transforming the relationship of government to industry." No doubt about it, the state midwived this transformation to the advantage of labor. A large part of what had happened was caught in the lyrics written by a coal miner in West Virginia:

> Some people don't know who to thank, for this
> "State of McDowell" that's so free; Give part
> of the praise to John Lewis and the rest of it
> to Franklin D.

But at precisely this moment the conjuncture of political forces, influence, and power shifted dramatically. The labor upheaval associated with CIO frightened not only the corporate world but also the petty bourgeoisie, millions of nonunion workers, and influential Southern Democratic congress members. As the tide of public opinion and voter preferences in the elections of 1937 and 1938 swung against labor militant, a large and influential sector of the labor movement itself, the barons of the AFL, swelled the anti-CIO tide. In this setting, Roosevelt's advisers counselled that any association between the President and John L. Lewis was filled with social and political dynamite. It was time, they said, for the president to distance himself from Lewis and CIO. Roosevelt followed that advice, and CIO suffered for it, losing its momentum, masses of its members, and much of its influence in 1938 and 1939.

Yet while Roosevelt drew away from his open alliance with CIO, other agencies of the state did what they could to defend unions against the rising antilabor sentiment. For almost three years, 1937-39, the NLRB, the Labor Department, and even the Supreme Court sought to guarantee workers and their unions the rights promised in the Wagner Act. Faced by intransigent employers, union officials and organizers repeatedly turned to the NLRB or to federal mediators for assistance. Their pleas were usually met promptly and with sympathy. If the national state could not promote a broad trade union advance in 1938 and 1939, it could, and it did, protect many trade unions from annihilation by antilabor employers.

Then, the coming of World War II produced effects for labor much like those associated with the Great War twenty-five years earlier. Once again corporate officials exercised more influence and power in wartime Washington than labor leaders. Nevertheless Roosevelt, like Woodrow Wilson before him, turned to the labor movement for input in defense planning and war production. Sidney Hillman of the CIO served as the Samuel Gompers of World War II. Over the resistance of employers, few of whom ever conceded voluntarily, the federal government's industrial relations agencies, most especially the National Defense Mediation Board and the National War Labor Board, compelled firms to sign agreements with unions that guaranteed union security, including even the closed shop. By early 1942, nearly all of the theretofore most recalcitrant antiunion large enterprises, including among others, Ford, Goodyear, and the Little Steel companies, signed contracts with affiliates of CIO. The wartime coal strikes of 1943 disclosed graphically how tolerant the Roosevelt White House was toward unruly labor. Despite the enormous public outcry against the UMW and its leader, John L. Lewis, whom the president despised personally, Roosevelt pursued policies which, in the event, guaranteed a victory for the strikers. Instead of smashing the strike and breaking the union, Roosevelt seized the mines and let his Interior Secretary, Harold Ickes, broker an agreement with Lewis. During the war years, as had happened from 1937 through 1939, the White House, the Labor Department, the NWLB, and the Supreme Court defended labor against its enemies in congress, the corporate world, and among the public-at-large.

It was the reality of a national state that could not be relied on to repress labor militancy that prompted big business in 1945 and 1946, unlike the years 1919-1922, to come to terms with trade unionism during the immediate postwar strike wave. The national labor policies that had been enacted during the New Deal, implemented in peacetime by the NLRB and in wartime by the NWLB, and legitimated by the Supreme Court, transformed the industrial relations arena in which business operated. The state's role in industrial relations prompted most large enterprises to negotiate "a live and let live" arrangement with the unions which represented their workers. Business promised to respect union security, to eliminate inequitable wage and job classifications, to deliver a rising real standard of living, and to bargain collectively. Unions pledged to guarantee shop-floor discipline, tame unruly workers, eliminate unsanctioned strikes, and respect managerial prerogatives. The NLRB, the Labor Department, and the federal judiciary stood ready to enforce the terms of the agreement. In reality, the Taft-Hartley Act of 1947, whose origins were to be found among those corporate sectors most anatagonistic to unions, confirmed the postwar arrangement between corporate enterprise and mass-production unionism. Taft-Hartley, as it was understood by business enterprises and implemented by public officials, simultaneously limited the labor movement's ability to advance and corporate capital's power to break unions. Taft-Hartley also taught lessons to the barons of the AFL. Its passage finally made the AFL realize that its quarrel with CIO weakened labor politically and diluted its influence in Washington. The negotiations which finally united AFL and CIO in 1955 were primarily engineered to create a united trade-union front which could better influence the shaping and implementing of federal labor policy. Had that common front been established ten or fifteen years earlier, the labor movement in the

United States might have experienced greater growth in the postwar years.

As it was, however, those who controlled the national state achieved precisely what they had always most cherished in the realm of labor relations, and, indeed, in all aspects and areas of national life: the promise of stability and harmony. The post-World War II system of American industrial relations seemed a thing of beauty to its admirers (who were legion), a machine which almost seemed to run of itself with just a little help from its friends on the NLRB and in the federal mediation and conciliation service as well as occasional well-timed and decisive presidential interventions during national emergency strikes. Under this system, when times were relatively hard and federal administrations antipathetic to labor (the Eisenhower and Nixon years), trade unionism shrank at the margins. When the economy expanded and administrations were more sympathetic (the Truman and Johnson years), unionism grew at the margins.

The first indications that this machine no longer ran of its own accord came with the administration of Jimmy Carter. The AFL-CIO helped elect Carter; its man, Ray Marshall, served as secretary of labor; its friends found jobs on the NLRB and the federal judiciary. Yet, through a combination of inadvertence and incompetence, the Carter Administration buried the AFL-CIO's hopes for the better. Instead, the Carter years saw the onset of a corporate offensive against unionism which carried along with it a majority in congress, influential members of the NLRB, a key bloc on the Supreme Court, and Ronald Reagan to the

White House. And it is now quite clear that the Reagan Republicans intend to dismantle fifty years of national labor policy and to put in its place a drastically new and different system of industrial and labor relations. Listen to the current chairman of the NLRB, Donald Dotson. "The scheme of unionized labor relations in the United States today," Dotson said, "bears no resemblance to what was intended by the farmers of our basic labor law." (The Reaganites are big on original intentions.) Just so no one might be confused by his intentions, Dotson added: "Collective bargaining frequently means labor monopoly, the destruction of individual freedom, and the destruction of the marketplace as the mechanism for determining the value of labor." I need not remind this audience where the implementation of Dotson's sort of values by the national state would leave the labor movement.

Where does this cursory summary of the state and labor in modern America leave us? What are its meanings or implications? Let me return to the several theories of the state in capitalist society with which I began and tell you how I read and interpret the historical record. Those who have run the American state have seldom served capital or labor directly; nor have they ordinarily acted as impartial honest brokers. Several implicit premises, or givens, have governed their policies and actions. First, without exception, the single predominant goal of public policy makers has been political stability and social peace. Second, that goal has made them antagonistic to all forms of unruliness, uncontrolled mass upheavals, and, obviously, the prospect of revolution. Third, those in power have ordinarily been responsive to shifts in the external balance of social, economic, and political power. Yet capital has usually held the upper hand. Its investment decisions and its ability to relocate production facilities are the keys to stability and social peace. Hence the state never consciously enacts and implements policies which will harm capital. Still, as happened during the World War I and New Deal years, state policy can have unintended consequences, which change the balance of power between labor and capital.

Are there any lessons for the labor movement in my reading of history? Frankly, I distrust those who turn to history for lessons, or guidance, or sanction. I find history more often abused than used. Yet let me close tonight by being one of the abusers. And let me say, that for the labor movement, history teaches us that the state can liberate as well as leash, that it can offer a real as well as a counterfeit liberty. To win the real thing, however, labor must develop, secure, and expand its organizational strength simultaneously in the workplace, the community, and the public arena. As Lynn Williams suggested here three years ago, the labor movement must indeed build bridges.